

FLIGHT JACKET

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Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif.

February 18, 2005

HMM-263 prepares helos for homecoming

Story by Cpl. Joel A. Chaverri

3rd MAW Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq — Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, is packing up for home after eight months of service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Part of the process involved stripping down the CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters, among other aircraft attached to the unit, for aerial transport back to their hometown unit in Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C.

"It's a long and grueling process to prepare these things," said Capt. Chris A. Browning, tactics officer, HMM-263. "Not only do we have to disassemble the rotors, but we also have to clean out the entire helicopter."

Airframe mechanics are responsible for ensuring that each piece is properly taken apart and cared for.

"Breaking them down is part of normal maintenance, so that part wasn't very hard," said Sgt. Michael L. Hughes, a 26-year-old native of Water Valley, Miss., and airframe mechanic with HMM-263. "The main thing is to knock pounds off so that they can fit on the plane."

An Air Force C-5 Galaxy cargo plane, one of the largest in the world, can hold three CH-46Es that have been properly stripped of excess weight and gear, according to Browning.

"We take out all of the radio and tactical gear that adds weight," said Browning, a 29-year-old native of Montgomery, Ala. "It's a lot easier to transport the (helicopters) when they're lighter."

The helicopters are extremely beat up and dirty from operating in the harsh conditions of the Iraqi desert. This requires each piece to be thoroughly cleaned as they are disassembled.

"The hardest part has been all of the dirt and grime," said Gunnery Sgt. Michael A. Hamilton, flight line chief, HMM-263. "There can be none left on the bird. It has to be spotless."

The process can be compared to the auto-detailing a car dealer does before reselling a pre-owned automobile. Only the helicopter is like an off-road truck that's been driven through the dirt for 100,000 miles. Hydraulic fluid, common to the Vietnam era helicopters, attracts dust from the high winds created by rotor wash. All of this build up has to be removed to get the (helicopters) back to showroom condition.

"It's taken us about five days just to clean these seven," said Hamilton, a 36-year-old native of Woodville, Texas, as he pointed to the aircraft. "We've had to use toothbrushes and rags to get into all of the nooks and crannies."

The faces of the Marines expressed they were happy to finally be getting home after all of the hard work put into the departure.

"We've finished all of the work and it makes me feel pretty good," said Hughes. "The (helicopters) are ready to go home, and so am I."



A crowd of Marines, family members and friends filled the station chapel Feb. 11 for a memorial for Captains Lyle L. Gordon and Paul C. Alaniz, Staff Sgt. Dexter S. Kimble and Lance Cpl. Tony L. Hernandez from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. The four Marines were killed Jan. 26 when their CH-53E Sea Stallion crashed near Ar Rutbah, Iraq. Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

Fallen comrades memorialized

Story by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

A memorial service was held Feb. 11 at the station chapel to honor four Marines from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, who were killed Jan. 26, along with 26 other Marines and one Sailor, when their CH-53E Sea Stallion crashed near Ar Rutbah, Iraq.

The lives of Captains Paul C. Alaniz and Lyle L. Gordon, Staff Sgt. Dexter S. Kimble and Lance Cpl. Tony L. Hernandez were commemorated during the ceremony, where more than 500 Marines, Sailors and family members gathered to remember the fallen warriors.

"Captain Alaniz was an amazing man," said Edward Ibarra, a family friend and retired sergeant major, as he read a letter from a friend of Alaniz currently serving in Afghanistan. "Although time and God did not allow him to touch as many lives as other men do in their lifetimes, those that he did touch will never be the same."

Capt. Paul Lee, a close friend and fellow pilot with HMH-

361, read Gordon's eulogy.

"Lyle Gordon was a man that loved life and taught everyone around him to love life too," said Lee. "He was always able to make the best of a tough situation. He always had that broad smile and when we were around him we couldn't help but smile too."

Kimble was remembered by Master Sgt. Daniel Villanueva, assistant maintenance chief, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465, MAG-16.

"If anyone had asked Dexter what his finest legacy to the world would be, he would have said his family, whom he now leaves behind," said Villanueva. "Dexter was very family oriented and very dedicated to those he loved. He made it a point to spend time with them and was a good husband and proud father."

Jennifer Garabaglia, a family friend, read Hernandez's eulogy, which was written by several of his friends who are cur-

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Weekend forecast from Miramar's weather station



73°/54°
Today



71°/53°
Saturday



71°/51°
Sunday

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Marine
awarded
Air Medal
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Corps revamps reading program

Story by Sgt. La Toya T. Graddy

MCB Quantico Combat Correspondent

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. — Marines have been supporting and defending our nation time after time, battle after battle, since Nov. 10, 1775. Leathernecks accomplish those goals by enhancing combat training, maintaining weapons and equipment, and promoting physical fitness. These practices physically prepare Marines for war. How can Marines mentally prepare themselves for war?

In the late 1980s, the 29th commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Alfred Gray, had a vision for Marines and their professional development. He established the Corps' professional reading program, designed to enhance every Marine's understanding of the art and science of war.

Gray explained the value of professional military education in a May 1989 Quantico Sentry story. "The stakes are too high, and our profession too complex, to allow the dabbler, or less than fully-committed, to pursue a commitment that will be less than rewarding to the individual and/or the Corps."

He added, "There are some who will maintain Marines are already over committed and have no time for self-study and professional reading: Those who believe that will have to reexamine their leadership priorities."

Today's global war on terrorism dictates the importance of physical and mental sharpness, according to Gen. Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps. "... Warfighting excellence demands that our Marines not only maintain physical endurance and technical proficiency, but, just as importantly, they also continue to develop intellectual adaptability along with effective problem-solving skills," said Hagee.

All Marine Message 007/05, released Feb. 8, announced the revision of the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program. Revising the reading program is the first step to reinvigorate a key element of Marine professional military education, according to Hagee.

The commandant also stated, "The revised professional reading program does not supplant the intent of the 29th commandant, Gen. Alfred Gray, whose initiative sought to promote the pursuit of life-long learning. Rather, this represents the logical, next step in the evolution of our program to perpetuate warfighting excellence into an increasingly uncertain future."

Keeping with the original objectives set forth in 1989, the six objectives remain unchanged and are reiterated as follows:

- * To impact a sense of Marine values and traits
- * To increase knowledge of our profession
- * To improve analytical and reasoning skills
- * To increase capacity of using printed media as a means of learning and communication
- * To increase knowledge of our nation's institutions and the principles upon which our country and way of life were founded
- * To increase knowledge of the world's governments, culture and geography

The revised program, based on history, will have an emphasis on warfighting and is designed to instill wisdom and judgment in military leaders.

Last November, a panel of retired and active duty servicemembers came together to vet the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program's required reading list. Formally known as the Commandant's Reading List, it is a large component of the program.

The reading list is tied to PME and shared across the ranks. Using Gray's original list as a starting point, the small working group deleted several books that were added over the past decade. Books that were not in print or reasonably available were also removed from the list.

"There are 112 separate books on the required reading list; 45 books on the enlisted reading list and 83 books on the officer reading list," said Col. Jeffery Bearor, Training and Education Command's chief of staff. "There are 16 books shared between the enlisted and officer lists."

Having shared books offers commanders the opportunity for enlisted Marines and officers to share PME based on the reading list.

"Dialogue and discussion groups can facilitate the critical thinking skills that are necessary for the professional growth and creativity of Marines, regardless of rank or (military occupation specialty) background," said retired Maj. Gen. Donald R. Gardner, the president of Marine Corps University.

Reading books on past American wars, the three levels of war, and major battlefield functions will also give Marines the opportunity to gain knowledge and an understanding of war, which in turn will enhance their ability to make timely and sound judgments, said Bearor. He added that by understanding what was read and relating it to what was learned in training would only benefit Marines in wartime.

"Today's warfare continually demands flexibility and split second decision making skills from Marines at all levels. Thus, the professional reading program serves as a mechanism to develop the individual Marine's intellectual framework and tactical calculations," Gardner said.

According to a statement reprinted in the recently released ALMAR, Gray stated that "success in battle depends on many things, some of which we will not fully control. However, the state of preparedness of our Marines (physical, intellectual, psychological, and operational) is in our hands. The study of our profession through selected readings will assist each Marine's efforts to achieve operational competence and to better understand the nature of our "calling" as leaders of Marines."

Marine Corps University will continue to support all Marine schools' efforts in utilizing the program. Visit MCU's Web site: www.mcu.usmc.mil for more information on the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program and updated reading list.



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MIRAMARKS

"How has the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program helped your development as a leader?"



LANCE CPL. BEN RUBALEAVA
Military Policeman
H&HS

"One day I'm going to use the leadership styles that I learned in the books I've read to lead my Marines. The books also help us learn more of our history. I especially enjoyed 'Nightingale Song'."



CWO 2 PHIL CHASSE
Combat Visual Information Center
Officer in Charge
H&HS

"It's imperative that you attend resident courses to become an effective leader. However, reading can help guide you on your path to a good leadership style."



GUNNERY SGT. TERRENCE SELLARS
Licensing Official
MWSS-373

"It is important for Marines of all ranks to read. It's a comprehensive learning tool that teaches everyone the basic principles."

FLIGHT JACKET

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Layout



Flat Stanley, dressed in a Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 225 flight suit, poses on a model F/A 18 Hornet in the Viking's ready room Feb. 1 before heading off to his next adventure in Korea. Photo by Lance Cpl. Skye Jones

'Flat Stanley' visits station

Story by Lance Cpl. Skye Jones

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

"Stanley Lambchop is a little boy who was flattened when a bulletin board fell on him. He wanted to visit his friends in California but it was too expensive to go by plane or train. Since Stanley was so flat, his family mailed him to visit his friends."

"Flat Stanley" took a trip from Vermont to visit Marine Corps Air Station Miramar where he met pilots, flew in an F/A-18D Hornet and helped land aircraft.

During his visit to California, he went up on stage opening night at an opera in Los Angeles, took a ride with the local police department and attended a morning colors ceremony at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, before heading off to Korea and Germany.

Stanley plans on skateboarding with professional skater Tony Hawk, rehearsing with the San Diego Symphony and meeting U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein in Washington, D.C., before going back home to an 8 year-old girl at Deerfield Valley Elementary School in Wilmington, Vt.

"We wanted to give Stan a wide range of experiences before his welcome home party in March," said Marcia Nesbitt, protective services worker, Child Welfare Services, County of San Diego. "My niece Savannah is going to have the most well-rounded Stanley in her class."

Each student in Savannah's third-grade class has their own Flat Stanley that they mailed to hosts like Nesbitt, who were then responsible for sending him on various adventures.

Dale Hubert, an elementary school teacher, invented the Flat Stanley Project in 1995. Hubert based the international project on the children's book series first published in 1964 by Jeff Brown.

Brown got the idea for his best-selling books from his son J.C.

J.C. was scared that the bulletin board above his bed would fall on him in the middle of the night and Brown joked, "Of course, when you wake up in the morning, you'll probably be flat." Every night Brown, J.C. and his other son Tony made up stories about the adventures they could all take if they were flat.

Today, selected schools are making Flat Stanleys and sending them on adventures all over the globe. Stanley usually returns to his original sender with postcards and pictures of

his travels.

"It's a great learning tool and kids have fun with it," said Susan Hathaway, volunteer, Flying Leatherneck Museum, MCAS Miramar. "They learn about diversity, geography and about places that they might not have a chance to see otherwise."

Savannah's class will have an opportunity to learn about the Marine Corps when her Stanley comes back to her.

"It's great that kids will get to see the diversity of our country and the many strengths of our nation through this project," said Capt. Nigel Fischer, ground-training officer, Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 225, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. "It's a privilege to have Flat Stanley here and to be part of Stanley's first ride in a Hornet—he's a famous guy."

Stanley flew in an F/A-18D Hornet with Fischer and Capt. Greg Smith, assistant maintenance officer, VMFA(AW)-225, in a diamond formation during the flyover at the Holiday Bowl at Qualcomm Stadium Dec 30. After the event, Nesbitt and Hathaway made Stanley a Vikings flight suit and dog tags.

"We hope that our little effort of taking Stanley up in the Hornet with us helps show that the Marine Corps is not only full of warfighters, but big brothers, dads and cousins—just like any other American," said Smith. "It brings contact between our communities and squadron. Vermont doesn't have a Marine Corps base and a lot of people don't know that we fly airplanes. This project will help show them what we do."

Lt. Col. Bill VanAtten, commanding officer, VMFA(AW)-225, had no problem giving Stanley permission to fly with his squadron.

"If Stanley's welcome at the White House, he can certainly fly with us," he said. "It was fun having him here."

Stanley went back to VMFA(AW)-225 in early February to express his gratitude to the Vikings. While on station, Stanley also visited the air traffic control tower and radar room to help land and navigate the station's aircraft.

"Savannah is going to be absolutely stunned when she finds out where her Stanley has been," said Nesbitt. "I bet nobody else's Stanley has been to a Marine Corps air station. Her Stanley has probably done what no other Stanley has done before."

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rently deployed to Iraq.

"Tony had many admirable traits," she said. "The one that sticks out in my mind the most was his ability to see the brighter side of any situation," Garabaglia read from the letter. "No matter what life dealt him, he would stick to his guns and fire back with laughter and happiness until the worst was over."

At the conclusion of the ceremony, a bagpiper played the Marines' Hymn. A 21-gun salute was rendered after Navy Lt. John R. Logan, chaplain, MAG-16, read the names of the other 26 Marines and one Sailor who gave their lives in service to their country.

Alaniz is survived by his wife, Thelma, their daughter Yvette and his mother Maria Quiroz.

Gordon is survived by his wife Kaci and his parents Dickey and Mary Gordon.

Kimble is survived by his wife, Dawanna, their five children and his parents, Willie and Mary Kimble.

Hernandez is survived by his wife Jacquie and his parents Roy Hernandez and Janette Trout.



Sgt. Matthew W. Tannehill (left), 28-year-old native of Las Vegas, Nev., and control tower operator with Marine Air Control Squadron 1, Marine Air Control Group 38, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, receives his Federal Aviation Administration control tower operator certificate Feb. 9 from Gunnery Sgt. O.J. Ray, a 36-year-old native of Ypsilanti, Mich., and examiner with MACS-1. Due to strict FAA requirements, it is a rare occasion for the certificates to be issued while deployed to a war zone. Photo by Cpl. Joel A. Chaverri

3rd MAW Marines earn FAA certificates in Iraq

Story by Cpl. Joel A. Chaverri

3rd MAW Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq — Some 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing Marines are earning their Federal Aviation Administration Control Tower Operator certificates for the first time during Iraqi Freedom.

The FAA has strict requirements for their certification, but the operational tempo, complexity of operations, and recent authorization from the FAA have put Marines on the fast track to their certificates.

“Issuing FAA certificates is outside the norm for Marines here,” said Capt. Jeff Meeker, detachment commander, Detachment C, Marine Air Control Squadron 1, Marine Air Control Group 38, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. “Based on the volume and complexity of air traffic here at Al Asad, (the FAA) decided that a qualification earned here was as good as a qualification earned at any other Marine Corps air station.”

Currently, Marines can earn a secondary Military Occupational Specialty within the Marine Corps that qualifies them to operate a Marine control tower. However, FAA regulations restrict Marines from managing air traffic in the United States unless they earn an FAA certificate.

“We have Marines out here that earned the title of control tower operator within the Marine Corps, but until recently (Al Asad hasn’t) been officially approved by the FAA to issue certificates,” said Gunnery Sgt. O.J. Ray, a qualified CTO examiner and air traffic controller with MACS-1.

A student Marine controller typically has to be at their particular duty station for at least six months before they can be eligible for their FAA CTO certification and getting it can take several years based on where they are stationed and how much experience in the field they get.

“Some bases don’t get a lot of air traffic, so it can take longer for a Marine to earn his license,” said Ray, a 36-year-old native of Ypsilanti, Mich.

The requirements for the certificate include numerous written tests and countless hours of on-the-job training.

“The hardest part is actually talking to and directing the traffic in the air,” said Cpl. Benjamin M. Ables, a 20-year-old native of Prescott Valley, Ariz., and air traffic controller with MACS-1. “You can study for written tests as much as you want, but none of that matters once you get in the tower and have to perform.”

Operating in a combat zone and working in unfamiliar skies increases the difficulty for controllers to attain the qualification.

“It can get pretty stressful,” said Ables, who qualified for his certificate last November, but just received his official FAA certificate. “Peoples’ lives are in your hands and you have to be able to handle that kind of pressure.”

Earning the FAA certificate is a big deal for air traffic control Marines, because it means greater responsibility and the ability to use it in the civilian world.

“If I were to get out of the Marine Corps, I would definitely pursue a career in air traffic control,” said Ables. “Especially now that the Marine Corps has helped me get my certificate.”

3rd MAW recognizes crew chief with combat Air Medal award

Story by 1st Lt. Courtney D. Jones

3rd MAW Public Affairs Officer

ALASAD, Iraq — In the role of helicopter assault support, there are very few opportunities to strike directly at the enemy.

Sgt. Angel A. Tavera, a crew chief flying with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, was recognized Feb. 12 for doing just that, and for potentially saving the lives of everyone onboard his CH-46E Sea Knight. The 22-year-old Rosenberg, Texas, native was presented the Air Medal with the Combat Distinguishing Device by Maj. Gen. Keith J. Stalder, commanding general, 3rd MAW.

On the night of Aug. 30, 2004, Tavera’s aircraft was transiting from Camp Fallujah to Ramadi when his section came under intense Anti-Aircraft Artillery fire. One of the pilots witnessed a barrage of tracer fire that appeared to be solid streams of light rocketing skyward and crossing his flight path. Tavera immediately identified that the fire was originating from four AAA pieces partially hidden in a palm grove to the right of the aircraft.

“I honestly thought it was only a matter of time, not if we were going to get hit — but when,” says 1st Lt. Darren G. Allison, from Durham, N.C., one of the pilots of the CH-46E that night.

Without hesitation, Tavera opened fire on the AAA pieces with his .50 caliber machine gun, despite the closeness of the rounds that arced towards their aircraft. All enemy fire came to a stop as his rounds impacted in the palm grove. As a result, the flight of two aircraft passed unharmed through the “kill zone.”

His summary of action states, “He exercised courage un-

der fire, exacting situational awareness and superior marksmanship while defending his CH-46E helicopter from enemy anti-aircraft fire in the vicinity of Ar Ramadi, Iraq.”

Once safely away from the enemy fire, Tavera checked passengers for injuries and the aircraft for battle damage. The fact that no Marines were injured and the aircraft sustained no damage is testimony to Tavera’s actions. Everyone aboard the Sea Knight believes that Tavera’s well-aimed fire saved the aircraft from battle damage or worse.

Tavera has been a key member of the Blue Knights for some time, and he also served with the unit in Operation Iraqi Freedom 1. The Marines of HMM-365 speak highly of Tavera’s enthusiasm, esprit de corps, and professionalism.

“Sergeant Tavera is one of our squadron’s most tactically proficient crew chiefs,” said Gunnery Sgt. William N. Hetterscheidt, flight line staff non-commissioned officer-in-charge from Lincoln Park, Mich. “I’m very proud of him for his quick decision making abilities and his demonstrated bravery.”

Tavera is humble when recalling the events of that night. “I saw the tracers and I reacted immediately,” said Tavera. “I knew I had to suppress the AAA fire or we would get hit.

“This deployment has helped me to appreciate all the classes and training we do every day back home,” he said. “All the time and effort we put into training as a squadron has really paid off. It was second nature to put my weapon on fire and open up.

Lt. Col. James S. O’Meara, commanding officer, HMM-365, expressed he was understandably proud of Tavera.

“Sergeant Tavera stands as a fine example of all Blue Knights and exemplifies the traits that define the term Marine,” O’Meara said.



Sgt. Angel A. Tavera, a 22-year-old native of Rosenberg, Texas, and crew chief with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, was awarded the Air Medal with the Combat Distinguishing Device Feb. 12 for “exercising courage under fire, exacting situational awareness and superior marksmanship while defending his CH-46E helicopter from enemy anti-aircraft fire in the vicinity of Ar Ramadi, Iraq.” Photo by Cpl. Joel A. Chaverri

The Blue Knights of HMM-365 have flown more than 3,700 combat flight hours, including more than 100 hours in support of the recent Iraqi elections, since arriving in Iraq in August 2004.

HMM-365 is based out of Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., and boasts a proud history of serving the Marine Corps and the nation. The squadron has recently served in both Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom I before deploying in support of Iraqi Freedom II.



Gunnery Sgt. R. Lee Ermey wraps up filming at the Pentagon for a future episode of his History Channel program, “Mail Call.” While there, he chatted with the Pentagon Channel about why it is important that America support its troops and their families.

By Samantha L. Quigley

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, — Former Marine Gunnery Sgt. R. Lee Ermey and a film crew spent Feb. 10 and 11 filming an upcoming episode of his show, “Mail Call,” at the Pentagon. He wrapped the taping hoping that he had unraveled some of the mysteries of the “Puzzle Palace” for his viewers.

Then he sat down with the Pentagon Channel to encourage America to support the troops as he does.

When the war on terrorism started, this Marine and movie tough guy — he’s played military men in several war films - wondered what he could do to support the troops and “pull my share of the load.”

“I’m too damn old to charge up that hill ... and kill the enemy anymore,” Ermey said. “I found out that I can (pitch in) by helping the families of the troops. So that’s basically been my objective for the past few years.”

He achieves that objective through the Veterans of

Foreign Wars Unmet Needs Program. Established to help alleviate the burden of military families in need, the VFW Foundation administers the program. It provides a wide array of assistance to those military families, Ermey said. For example, they can obtain help for basic, but often expensive, needs such as infant formula, medical fees, groceries, home and car repairs, and even rent or mortgage.

If military families find themselves in a legitimate predicament, they need only go to the Unmet Needs Web site and click on the box indicating that help is needed. From there, they have a choice of filling out an online application or printing the form and mailing it in. The application will be reviewed and appropriate action taken, Ermey said.

For those without access to a computer, the foundation offers a toll-free number 1-866-789- 6333.

Donations of cash or time and skills can also be made through the Web site, along with separate links from which to choose to support the troops.

Battle highlights joint capabilities

Story by Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Nothing highlights the importance of flexibility and joint capabilities better than the recent battle of Fallujah, the commandant of the Marine Corps told the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb. 10.

Gen. Michael Hagee said the battle in November and December 2004 highlighted the flexibility, adaptability and joint capabilities of the U.S. military.

“The Marine force, tightly integrated with Army brigades, Seabees, joint air assets, and coalition forces including five Iraqi battalions, mounted a high-intensity joint assault in a demanding urban environment, destroying the insurgent safe haven in Fallujah,” Hagee said. “This close-quarters fight against an adaptable and dangerous enemy was executed rapidly and successfully.”

What’s more, the general said, once the fight was over, the Marines and soldiers “immediately returned to counterinsurgency and civil affairs operations.”

While the battle highlighted success, there are challenges ahead, Hagee told the senators. “The tempo of operations and demands on the force are extremely high across the entire Marine Corps, both regular and reserve, in supporting the global war on terror,” he said.

Since Operation Enduring Freedom, the Corps has gone from a peacetime deployment rotation of six months deployed and 18 months home to a 1-to-1 rotation: seven months deployed, seven months at home station.

“This means that Marine units in the operating forces are either deployed or are training to relieve deployed units,” he said. “No forces have been fenced, and since 9/11 we have activated in excess of 95 percent of our selected Marine Corps Reserve units, the majority who have served in either Iraq and Afghanistan.”

In 2004, the Corps met recruiting and retention goals. “Although we remain on track to meet our annual goal this year, the additional effort required by our recruiters and our career retention specialists is quite significant,” he said.

Congress authorized an increase of 3,000 Marines for the Corps in the fiscal 2005 budget. Hagee said in addition to that increase, the Corps is looking for ways to better organize the force and reduce operational tempo.



A CH53E Super Stallion with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (REIN), Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, picks up reconnaissance Marines with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton Jan. 31 to insert them at East Miramar's Afghan Village for a three-day training exercise to qualify them as Special Operations Capable. *Photo by Cpl. Andrew J. Hurt*

HMM-163 aids recon Marines in mission

Story by Lance Cpl. Skye Jones

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

As the sun set over the hills of East Miramar, two CH-53E Super Stallions from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (REIN), Marine Air Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, inserted 22 reconnaissance Marines into Miramar's vast open brush for a Special Operations Training Group mission Jan. 31.

The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit's Marines endured a three-day long training exercise in East Miramar's "Afghan Village," which provided them with realistic pre-deployment training and certified them as Special Operations Capable.

"The Marines had to set up recon sites and gather information from the village in order to conduct small-scale precision raids, while avoiding being seen by anyone," explained Staff Sgt. Chad Chalkey, reconnaissance and surveillance urban sniper instructor, SOTG, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. "Being inserted over the horizon via air is the best bet because the Marines can get further inland."

"It interjects realism into the training," added Capt. Michael Critchley, section leader, HMM-163.

Critchley flew one of the two CH-53Es during the training exercise. He and several other Marines from HMM-163

picked up the recon Marines from Camp Pendleton and then launched them into East Miramar.

The training exercise was challenging to set up because the designated landing zone had many barriers to work around.

"East Miramar is in close proximity to the Scripps Ranch ridge line, which creates a noise problem," said Staff Sgt. Brandon E. Ellis, air chief, SOTG. "Also, it's a heavily controlled air space. However, after a lot of scheduling the training was approved."

According to Ellis, a McConnelsville, Ohio, native, these are the first Marine Corps helicopters to land in East Miramar for a training evolution.

"This will set the pace for future training evolutions and set the foundation down for other units," said Ellis. "If this works out, it will not only benefit the MEU, but all of the helo squadrons at Miramar."

Ellis explained that pilots would have a landing zone close to station, versus going to Camp Pendleton.

"East Miramar is a hot transit for landing practice," said Ellis. "Important training can be conducted close by, which will cut the time the helos are being used—saving the life on the air frames."

According to Critchley, HMM-163 is just doing their job to support the ground Marines.

Marine KC-130J joins mission in Iraq

Story by Cpl. Paul Leicht

3rd MAW Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq — Establishing another milestone in Iraq, the Marine Corps deployed its newest refueling tanker aircraft—the KC-130J Hercules—for the first time Feb. 13.

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 relieves the 'Yankees' of VMGR-452, a Newburgh, N.Y., based reserve Marine unit deployed here since August 2004, and brings with them the new KC-130J.

"KC-130 is a versatile, tactical aerial refueler/transport aircraft that supports all six functions of Marine Aviation, and it is the Corps' only fixed wing assault support aircraft" said Maj. Rodney A. Funk, operations officer, VMGR-452, who is a former Operational Test Pilot and assistant officer-in-charge for the KC-130J Fleet Introduction Team. "The KC-130 'J Model' enhances and improves upon the abilities of the Hercules fleet to support the (operating forces)."

Funk, a native of Lancaster, Pa., added, "Like previous models, the 'J' also provides both fixed and rotary wing tactical in-flight refueling, as well as rapid ground refueling of aircraft or tactical vehicles. This aircraft is a force-multiplier that is really well suited to the mission needs of the Marine Corps."

The Marine Corps has gradually started to replace its active fleet of KC-130Fs and KC-130Rs with the new KC-130J.

"Compared to the other models of the KC-

130, the 'J' has increased speed and range, in addition to other capabilities," said Maj. David A. Krebs, operations officer, Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 3, and a former pilot with VMGR-252 who has also flown many hours in the KC-130J during the squadron's conversion process.

Krebs, a native of Monroeville, Ohio, further explained that the 'J' has an enhanced air-to-air refueling system with a 50 to 100 percent higher fuel flow rate, in addition to an armored cockpit, new night vision capabilities, heads up displays and state-of-the-art avionics.

Additional major improvements include a fully integrated navigation system with a dual embedded Global Positioning System, mission planning system, low-power color radar, digital map display, and a new digital autopilot, according to Funk.

Buying new aircraft and training new aircrews on the "J" model requires time. The Corps' KC-130T models' still have a lot of service life left on the airframes and is still a reliable and very capable platform to use as a bridge until the transition is complete, according to Krebs.

The "T" models will continue to support the operating forces indefinitely and will play a pivotal supporting role while the Fleet transitions completely to the KC-130J, according to Funk.



Cpl. Christopher N. McCarthy, electronics technician, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 11, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, competes with a student from Spring Valley Middle School in a push up contest during the school's trip to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Feb. 8. Photo courtesy of Alisa Hertzler, Single Marine Program coordinator

Marines mentor local at-risk students

Story by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

More than 30 students and teachers from Spring Valley Middle School in Spring Valley, Calif., visited the air station Feb. 8 to learn about life in the military from a group of special Marines.

On a regular basis, several Miramar Marines volunteer their time and travel to Spring Valley to mentor a group of at-risk students who have been selected by their teachers and counselors.

In a reversal of roles, the Marines invited the students to the air station for a hands-on experience inside a helicopter flight simulator and a demonstration from several military working dogs.

The people responsible for linking the Marine mentors and teenagers together were Jay Anderson and Alisa Hertzler.

Anderson, a guidance counselor at Spring Valley Middle School, started the Marine mentor program in 2004 with the intent on helping at-risk students within his school.

"The Marines come (to Spring Valley) twice a month and meet with a select group of students and mentor them," Anderson remarked. "We like to have them meet with the same Marine as often as possible, but sometimes duty requirements pull that Marine away."

Anderson added that the feedback they receive from the students shows the teachers

and mentors the program works.

"The best indicator that I have of its effectiveness is we have a waiting list of over 40 students to participate," Anderson said. "It is growing as it's becoming known as a valued program (by the parents, teachers and students)."

Hertzler, the Single Marine Program coordinator, Marine Corps Community Services, MCAS Miramar, said she helped start the program because the SMP did not have any local mentoring programs in place when she arrived on station.

"When I first began as SMP coordinator there were not a lot of community volunteer opportunities offered through the SMP," said Hertzler. "I looked into several programs, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, etc., as well as contacted several local schools to find out if we would be able to work with them. They all had reservations (about) having (servicemembers) act as mentors because of the inconsistency of their schedules."

"About one year later Mr. Anderson contacted one of his former colleagues at (3rd Marine Aircraft Wing) and presented the idea to him. I met with Mr. Anderson and we discussed the logistics."

Hertzler added that Anderson's experience as a Marine allowed the two to work together to make the program a success, despite

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Auto Skills Center keeps pace with vehicle technology

Story by Pfc. James B. Hoke

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Having long overdue maintenance performed on a vehicle by a civilian mechanic can be an expensive task.

According to Mike Young, manager, Miramar Auto Skills Center, however, for approximately 5 percent of what it costs to repair a vehicle, servicemembers can have their automobiles fixed without leaving Miramar.

Formerly known as the Miramar Auto Hobby Shop, the Miramar Auto Skills Center changed its name in order to reflect the skills required to keep up with modern vehicles.

"Before, we would install car stereos, help rebuild old cars and help balance wheels and tires," said Young. "Now when we are doing things, we find that we have to get into the onboard computer systems and things like that, so it has become a little more technical than it has been in the past."

"That is part of the reason for the name change, as the cars are getting a little more technical," he added. "(Fixing automobiles) is part of a skills learning process now."

The new technically enhanced vehicles that inspired the name change have also caused a few other changes at the center.

"The training level of the staff has been increased and what people get as patrons has been shifted around a little bit, which is good for (first-time mechanics) because they aren't familiar with the older vehicles," said Young.

Although newer vehicles have changed the center a great deal, they have not increased the cost of maintenance.

"This is a great place to save money on vehicle maintenance," said Young. "If you or anyone you know has gone to town for vehicle maintenance, it's around \$70 an hour."

"We've done surveys in the past on how much money people have saved here," said Young. "One Saturday we (calculated) up to \$5,200 saved."

According to Young, all active duty, Department of Defense personnel, active reservists and retirees can use the services the center has to offer.

"We show (patrons) how to operate the equipment and let them work on their own cars with all the (services) they need for the day," said Young. "We have an all-repair manual, so if there is any repair you or we don't know, we can get information about."

Aside from up-to-date vehicle information, the center also provides a seemingly limitless amount of tools.

"We provide all the tools," said Young. "I don't know that there is anything we don't have. However, if a new car comes in that needs a certain tool that we don't have, we find out where we can purchase the tool and get it as soon as possible."

According to Lance Cpl. Bradley Dollar, crew chief, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, the staff is exceptionally helpful in rendering assistance to its patrons.

CFR Marine awarded Purple Heart

Story by Pfc. James B. Hoke

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

On the morning of July 15, 2004, an explosion at the police station in Haditha, Iraq, wounded six of the 20 Marines that were living there.

Sgt. Mohamad Akhtar, firefighter, Crash, Fire, Rescue, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, was one of the six injured Marines who returned to Miramar after serving 11 months in the war zone, receiving a Purple Heart Feb. 1 for wounds he sustained during the explosion.

“It is (humbling) to be recognized with something like the Purple Heart,” said Akhtar.

However, receiving the Purple Heart is only a part of Akhtar’s story.

“I was a linguist specialist,” said Akhtar. “I was with the (Human Source Intelligence) Exploitation team attached to (3rd Battalion, 4th Marines), which later changed over to (1st Battalion, 8th Marines) in July.

“While (serving with) Marines from 1/8, I was attached to a combined arms platoon and we were living at the Haditha Police Station,” Akhtar added. “Our job was basically to be a liaison to ensure we had Marines in the area, as well as maintain positive relations between the Iraqi nationals and the United States Marine Corps.”

July 15, two vehicle-borne improvised explosion devices advanced toward the buildings near the police station.

“The first bomb was a Russian truck loaded with thirty 155mm (artillery) rounds, and the second vehicle, which exploded three

or four minutes later, had 100 pounds of C-4 (explosives),” recalled Akhtar. “I was wounded in my right leg near the shin, and in my right and left arms.”

The six Marines wounded in the blast didn’t let the explosion prevent them from checking on their fellow Marines located on higher levels of the building, as well as the roof.

“It happened so fast,” remarked Akhtar. “We had Marines on the roof and we had to make sure they were okay. The blast had literally blown them back about 15 feet, so we had to get up to the roof and make sure they were good to go.

“The situation was actually handled quite professionally,” Akhtar added. “There wasn’t any sitting around. Everyone was pretty much working off of adrenaline and muscle memory. They all knew what to do and they all did it.”

Although the explosion wounded six Marines, it killed nearly 50 Iraqis and wounded 15 others.

“The insurgents were trying to blow up all three buildings,” Akhtar stated. “They killed maybe 50 Iraqis, injured six Marines and wounded 15 Iraqis, so the two bombs were pretty large.

“At the time it happened, it was said that the bomb was the first or second largest bomb to blow up in Iraq since stability operations began,” Akhtar added. “It didn’t take out the police station but it did do major damage to the structure.”

With all the turmoil occurring overseas, family members have little to rely on other



Sgt. Mohamad Akhtar, firefighter, Crash, Fire, Rescue, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, MCAS Miramar, has the Purple Heart pinned on by his daughter, Taylor L. Akhtar, and his wife, Jennifer L. Akhtar, at a formation Feb. 1. Akhtar was wounded by two vehicle-borne improvised explosion devices at the Haditha Police Station in Iraq July 15.

than the hope that their loved ones will return home safely.

“I was scared when I heard about him,” said Jennifer L. Akhtar, Mohamad Akhtar’s wife. “I happen to be in a Starbucks getting a coffee and looked down and there is my husband on the front page of the New York Times. If it hadn’t been for that, I would not have known he was wounded right away.”

Once Akhtar returned home, his wife and daughter were both grateful for his return and even participated in pinning on his Purple Heart medal.

“Out of all the medals, all the promotions and everything else my husband has received, (the Purple Heart) is the one award I am glad that I got to be here for,” Jennifer concluded.

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deployment and work schedules.

“Being a retired Marine, (Anderson) understood the possibility that we might have some (mentors) who couldn’t make it half the time, but he still knew the positive influence even one meeting with a Marine or Sailor would have on the students,” Hertzler said.

For one Marine, being a youth mentor means enjoying his time with people he makes an impression upon.

“If someone they truly look up to helps teach them life’s lessons, then hopefully it will sink in more and perhaps give them the extra push they need to make something of themselves and not end up on the streets or in jail,” said Cpl. Christopher N. McCarthy, electronics technician, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 11, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

Michael Salazar, an eighth-grader at the middle school, said he has been participating in the program for two years and has enjoyed all the interaction he has experienced with the Marines.

“This is pretty fun because we get to talk to Marines about what they do,” he said. “This kind of makes me want to be a Marine because it seems fun. The Marines are good at talking to us about life and what they do and what they get out of it.”

Cpl. Harmony B. Garcia, Marine Air Ground Task Force plans chief, MAG-11, said she chose to become a mentor because she knows “for some of these kids it means the world to them that someone is simply taking the time to get to know them without judging them and they can tell that we honestly care about them.”

PREP course assists servicemembers

Story by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

For more than 30 years the Preparation and Relationship Enhancement Program has been used by organizations around the world to save marriages or to improve relationships prior to marriage.

According to www.psychologymatters.org, psychologists Howard Markman and John Gottman found that the quality of interaction between husbands and wives was highly predictive of marital distress or divorce. Their studies found that negative interaction is a dynamic behavior factor that couples can change to improve their odds of staying together.

More than 30 years later, this program is used by the United States Navy Chaplains Corps to help marriages and soon-to-be-married couples better communicate with each other and learn techniques that can save an otherwise doomed marriage.

According to Navy Capt. Douglas J. Olauson, command chaplain, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, the Navy has used the program for nearly 15 years and the program is working with overwhelming success.

“I was the chaplain of 1st Force Service Support Group and we put 20 to 30 couples through the program per month,” Olauson said. “It is a great tool to learn to better communicate with your spouse or with your children.”

Olauson added that throughout his years as a chaplain, he has found that PREP has helped couples listen more intently to each other.

“The communication area is where PREP has been most powerful,” Olauson said. “It helps in many different ways, but I have been particularly impressed at how it assists people to become better listeners. In

that, you know you are going to benefit a marriage profoundly.”

The chaplain added that a common misconception is that the program is for newlyweds or couples but in fact it is not.

“You can be 20 years old and newly married or 65 years old and married for 40 years and be significantly benefited by PREP. I know this because I have seen it work,” he said. “Anyone can go to this. It isn’t an enlisted only (program). Whether you are officer or enlisted is irrelevant. The question is, will your marriage benefit from this and the answer is absolutely.”

One couple that attended a recent PREP course, Isaac and Margarita Lynn, said the program taught them both things they already knew about each other, but also opened new doors for their methods of communication.

“I went to learn to solve problems in the correct way,” Isaac said. “The bottom line is a lot of learning more about your spouse and how to get more out of our marriage.”

Margarita’s experience was “weird” because she learned about herself and realized that she and her husband are the same people.

“We took the Myers/Briggs type indicator and found we are exactly the same,” she said.

Isaac said he initially attended the program as a prerequisite to using the chapel for their formal marriage but realized he would have attended before his marriage had he known about it.

“I would recommend this to anybody,” he said.

According to Navy Chief Petty Officer Marcus A. Taylor, lead chief petty officer, chaplain’s office, MCAS Miramar, the program helps build a safe environment for communicating with anyone.

“It’s not just for a relationship; it can be to learn how to interact with people. This is a form of communication that denies all negative communication between two people,” Taylor said. “It prevents miscommunication, prevents people from getting frustrated and getting angry and upset. If done properly, this resolves problems.”

Taylor added that while better communication skills and listening tools are part of the program, there is one ultimate goal.

“The ultimate goal through proper communication is having a lifelong committed relationship with your spouse that will take you into your twilight years,” he said. “We give them the tools they need to make that happen.”

Taylor said that people put a lot of effort into material objects in life, but when it comes to marriage, love and children, most people feel that love will conquer all.

“When it comes to marriage and having children, some people think that everyone knows how to do it and that love will conquer all. Well, that is not true,” he said. “It doesn’t mean that everyone is not able to do it, we are all able to. But once we are taught, it sets the light bulb off and things are so much clearer.”

For one single, soon-to-be married corporal, this course helped her realize what to expect from herself and her future husband.

“It helped me realize why I do certain things,” said Cpl. Shauna L. Wahlquist, flight line mechanic, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. “This helped me realize that couples can focus on and learn to understand each other before marriage.”

Miramar Movies

The Station Auditorium is located in building 2242, and will be featuring the following movies free of charge. Outside food and drinks are not permitted. For more information, contact 577-4143 or log on to www.mccsmiramar.com.

Friday:
4:30 p.m. Fat Albert (PG)
6:30 p.m. The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (R)
8:45 p.m. Meet the Fockers (PG-13)

Saturday:
6:30 p.m. White Noise (PG-13)
8:30 p.m. Meet the Fockers (PG-13)

Sunday:
1 p.m. Fat Albert (PG)
6:30 p.m. Meet the Fockers (PG-13)

Wednesday:
6:30 p.m. Elektra (PG-13)

Thursday:
1:00 p.m. Racing Stripes (PG)
6:30 p.m. Beyond the Sea (PG-13)

Miramar Softball Events

The Miramar Intramural Softball League swings into action today with games at 11:15 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. on Miramar Sports Fields #2 and #4, adjacent to the Miramar Sports Complex. For more information, call (858) 577-1202. In addition, the 1st Annual Miramar Bombs Away Softball Tournament will be held at the Miramar Sports Fields Feb. 19. For more information on entry fees and start times, call (858) 577-8920.

Religious Services

The Chaplain’s Office is located in building 5632 and coordinates regularly-scheduled worship services. For the location and meeting schedules of religious activities, contact the Chaplain’s Office at 577-1333.

Sunday:
9:30 a.m. Protestant worship service
11 a.m. Roman Catholic Eucharist

Wednesday:
7 p.m. Baptist service

Monday-Friday:
11:30 a.m. Roman Catholic daily mass

Jewish:
7 p.m. First Friday of the month MCRD
7:30 p.m. Last Friday at Edson Range Chapel

Tax Center Assistance

The MCAS Miramar Income Tax Center is now available to help servicemembers prepare and electronically file their federal and state income taxes for free. Hours are 9 a.m to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, call (858) 577-1040.

Intramural Volleyball

The Miramar Intramural Volleyball League will conduct a coaches meeting inside the Semper Fit Center conference room Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. League play officially begins Mar. 9 at the Miramar Sports Complex, with games being held at 5:30 and 6:30 p.m. For more information, call (858) 577-1202 or visit www.mccsmiramar.com.

Sandtrap Restaurant

The Sandtrap Restaurant has been temporarily closed, pending repairs. The services, including breakfast, lunch and bar lounge operation, have been moved to the Enlisted Club. The Enlisted Club is now open to all patrons during breakfast and lunch.

Annual Miramar Bench Press Competition

The yearly Miramar Bench Press Competition will be held at “The Barn” (Building 7115) Wednesday. Participant check-in and weigh-in will begin at 5 p.m., with the competition following at 6 p.m. The competition will be divided by gender and age group. For more information, call (858) 577-9143.

Impounded Vehicles

The following vehicles have been impounded and need to be claimed by the owners. Towing fees average \$113, storage fees \$28 daily. For more information contact the Provost Marshal’s Office at 577-1461.

Vehicle:	License:	Vehicle:	License:
1995 Dodge Neon	CA/3KGZ374	1993 Plymouth Voyager	4HVP334
1989 Subaru GL	CA/1REE135	Unk. Mazda 626	CA/1STD385
Unk. Honda Prelude	No Plates No VIN	1993 Ford Escourt	CA/3EKK843
Red Sea King Boat	No Plates No ID	1998 Honda DX	CA/2YBS381
Hydra Sports Boat	FL/CZ39M	Unk. Honda Accord	GA/77693
Unk. VW Jetta	No Plates No VIN	1990 Ford Mustang	CA/2TAX992

